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(54) **ROLE PLAY SYSTEM**

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(73) Assignee: **Microsoft Corporation**, Redmond, WA (US)

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A63F 13/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **463/9**; 463/1

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 463/1, 463/9, 29

See application file for complete search history.

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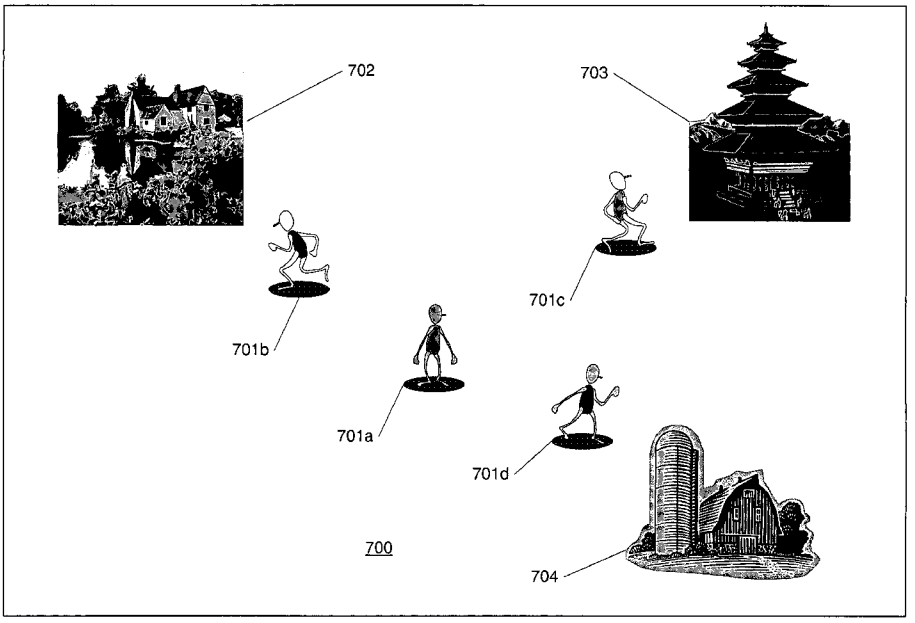
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A video game system and method is described in which a player-controlled icon in a map scene represents a group or party of characters, and in response to the icon entering a location on the map scene, automatically dispersing the icon into multiple icons representing the various characters. Upon dispersing, the various characters may automatically move to different areas of the location based on individual character preferences. The player may choose to control one of the characters in the location and interact with one or more characters/objects in the location. The interaction may be recorded as it occurs, and the player may switch control to a different character and play the same interaction from a second character's point of view. Under the second character's point of view, the original interaction and/or its outcome may be changed.

17 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets



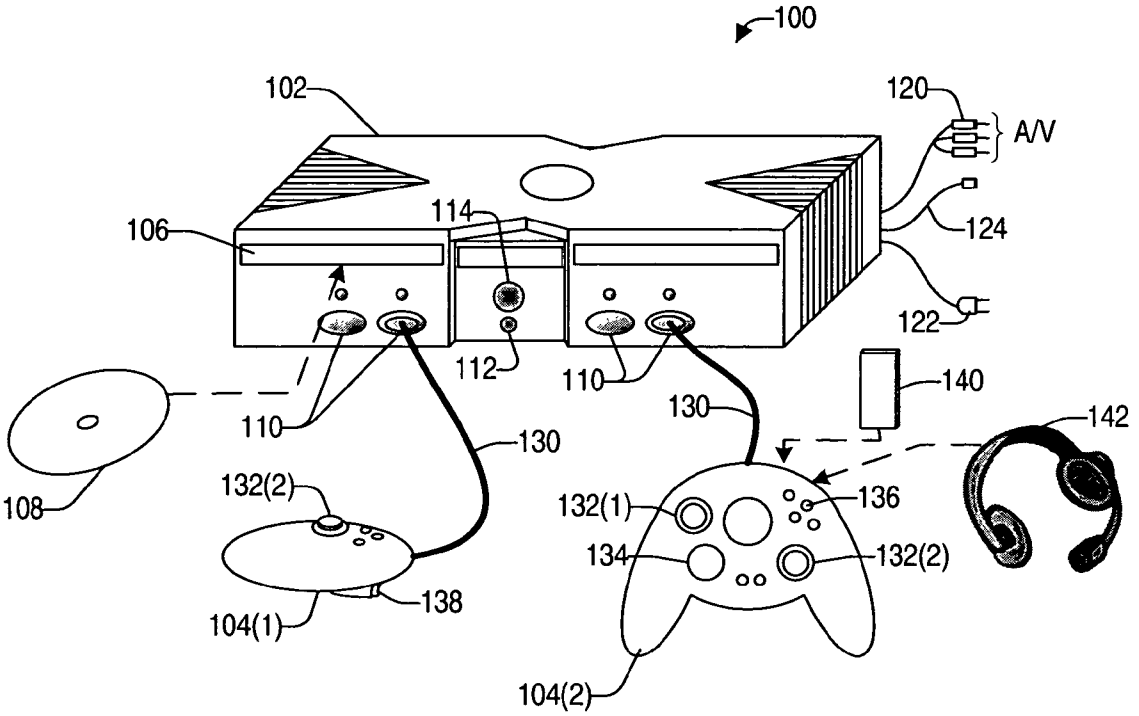

100
102
120
A/V
106
114
124
122
112
110
140
130
142
110
130
108
132(2)
132(1)
136
134
132(2)
138
104(1)
104(2)

Fig. 1

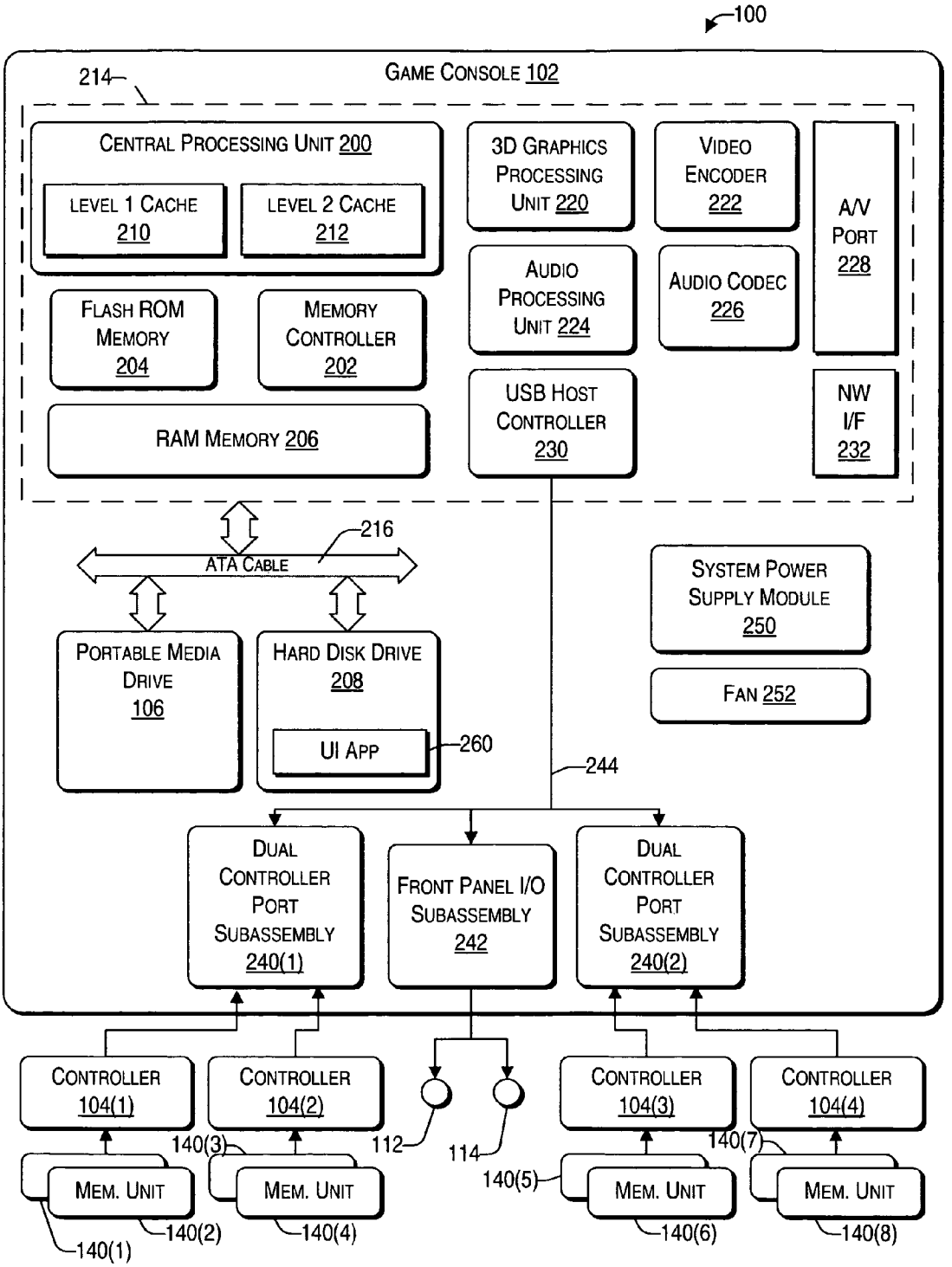

100
GAME CONSOLE 102
214
CENTRAL PROCESSING UNIT 200
LEVEL 1 CACHE 210
LEVEL 2 CACHE 212
3D GRAPHICS PROCESSING UNIT 220
VIDEO ENCODER 222
A/V PORT 228
AUDIO PROCESSING UNIT 224
AUDIO CODEC 226
FLASH ROM MEMORY 204
MEMORY CONTROLLER 202
USB HOST CONTROLLER 230
NW I/F 232
RAM MEMORY 206
216
ATA CABLE
SYSTEM POWER SUPPLY MODULE 250
FAN 252
PORTABLE MEDIA DRIVE 106
HARD DISK DRIVE 208
UI APP
260
244
DUAL CONTROLLER PORT SUBASSEMBLY 240(1)
FRONT PANEL I/O SUBASSEMBLY 242
DUAL CONTROLLER PORT SUBASSEMBLY 240(2)
CONTROLLER 104(1)
CONTROLLER 104(2)
CONTROLLER 104(3)
CONTROLLER 104(4)
112
114
140(3)
140(5)
140(7)
MEM. UNIT
140(1)
140(2)
140(4)
140(6)
140(8)

Fig. 2

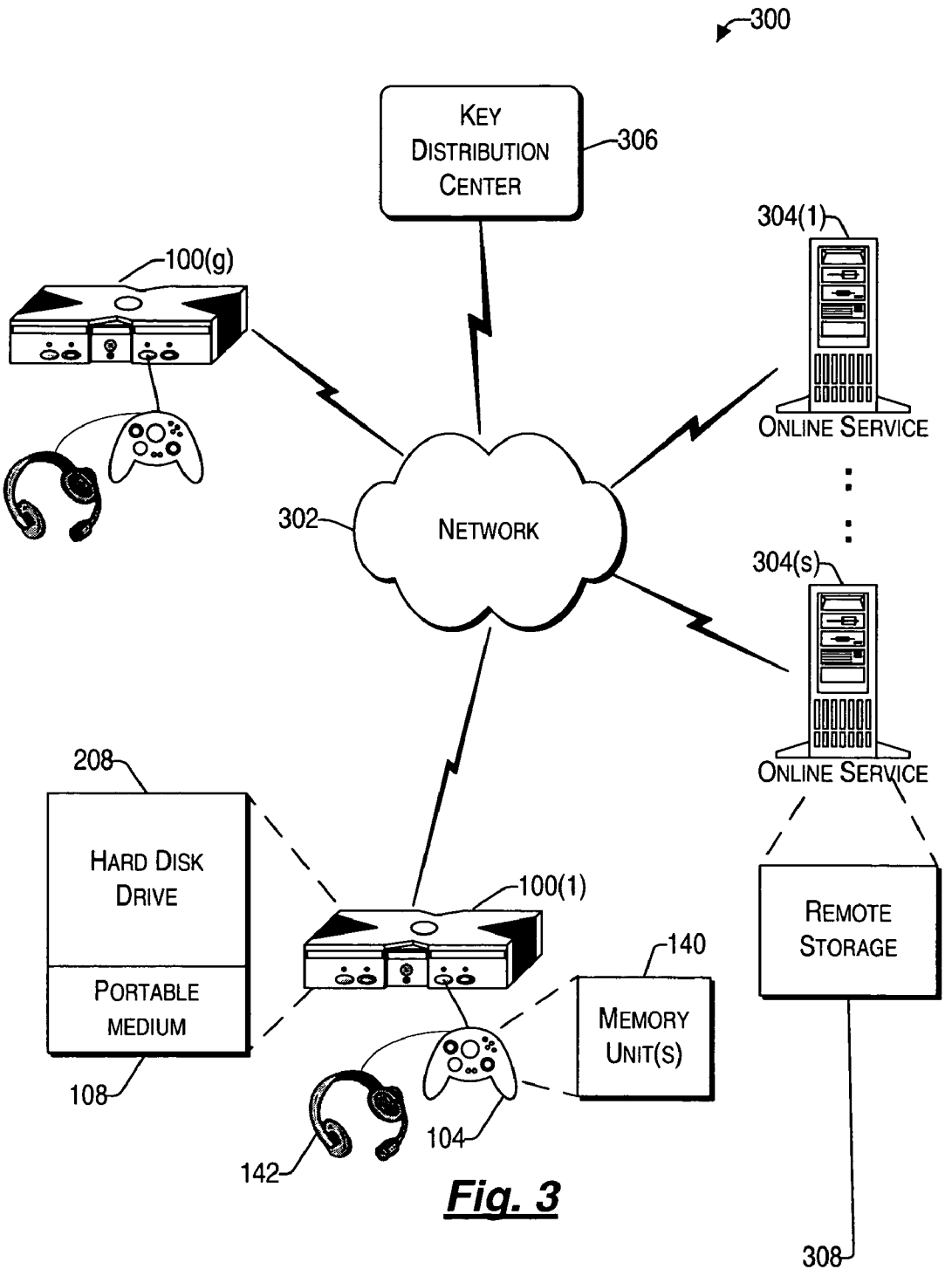

300
KEY DISTRIBUTION CENTER
306
304(1)
100(g)
ONLINE SERVICE
302
NETWORK
304(s)
ONLINE SERVICE
208
HARD DISK DRIVE
PORTABLE MEDIUM
108
100(1)
140
MEMORY UNIT(S)
REMOTE STORAGE
104
142
308

Fig. 3

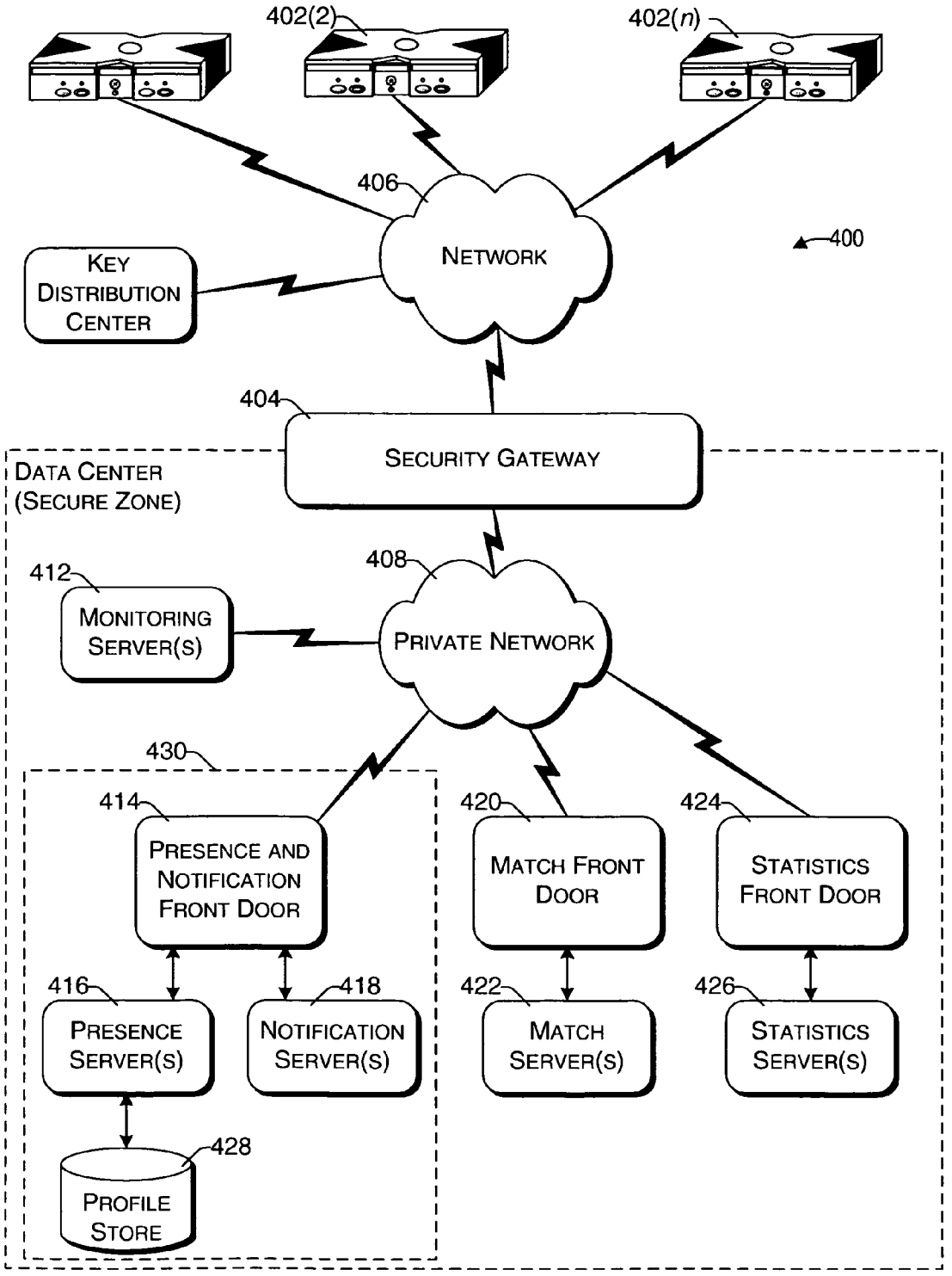

402(2)
402(n)
406
NETWORK
400
KEY DISTRIBUTION CENTER
404
SECURITY GATEWAY
DATA CENTER (SECURE ZONE)
408
412
MONITORING SERVER(S)
PRIVATE NETWORK
430
414
PRESENCE AND NOTIFICATION FRONT DOOR
420
MATCH FRONT DOOR
424
STATISTICS FRONT DOOR
416
PRESENCE SERVER(S)
418
NOTIFICATION SERVER(S)
422
MATCH SERVER(S)
426
STATISTICS SERVER(S)
428
PROFILE STORE

Fig. 4

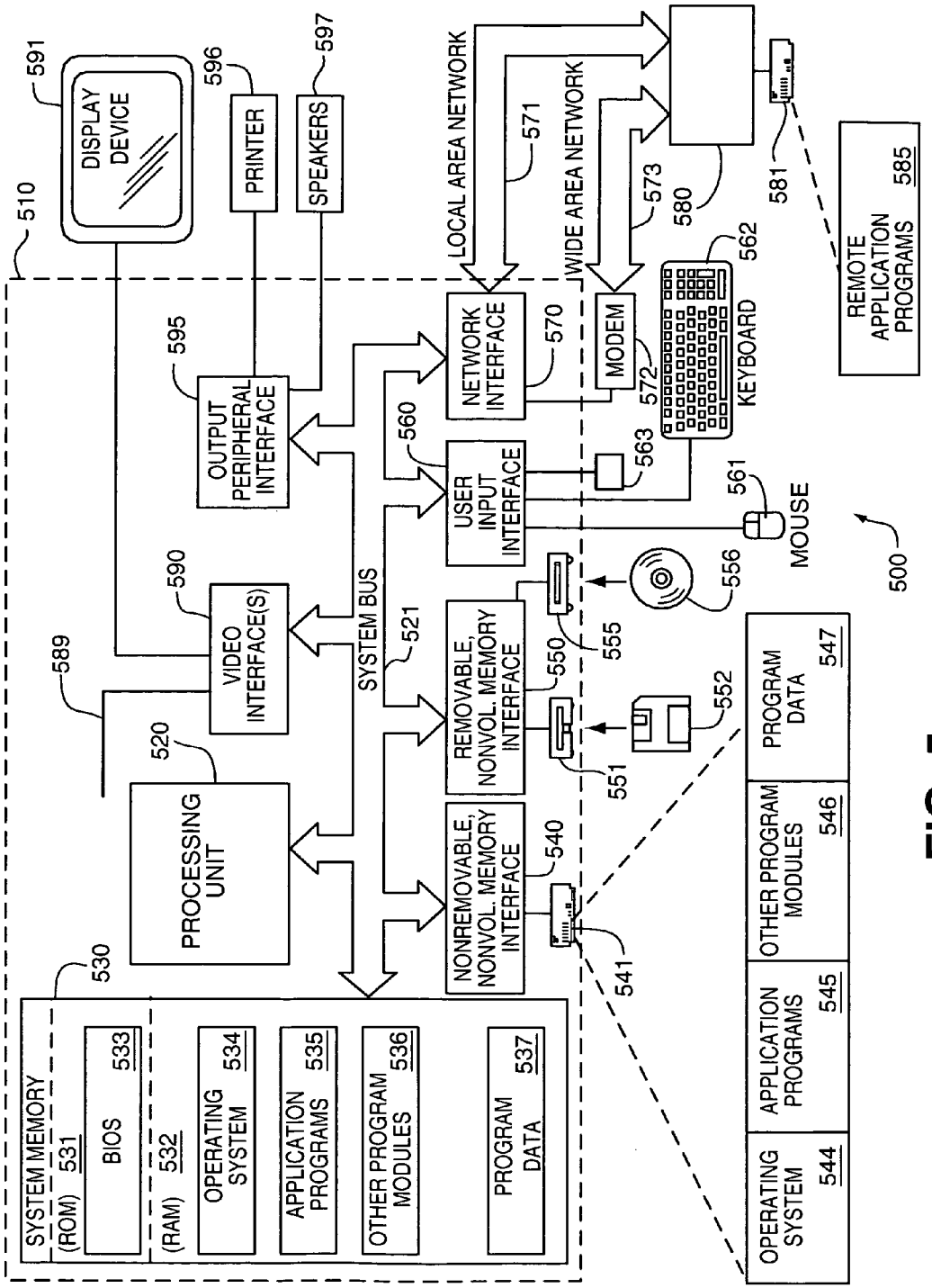

510
591
DISPLAY DEVICE
596
PRINTER
597
SPEAKERS
595
OUTPUT PERIPHERAL INTERFACE
590
VIDEO INTERFACE(S)
589
520
PROCESSING UNIT
530
SYSTEM MEMORY
(ROM) 531
BIOS 533
(RAM) 532
OPERATING SYSTEM 534
APPLICATION PROGRAMS 535
OTHER PROGRAM MODULES 536
PROGRAM DATA 537
SYSTEM BUS
521
NONREMOVABLE, NONVOL. MEMORY INTERFACE
540
REMOVABLE, NONVOL. MEMORY INTERFACE
550
USER INPUT INTERFACE
560
NETWORK INTERFACE
570
LOCAL AREA NETWORK
571
MODEM
572
WIDE AREA NETWORK
573
580
581
REMOTE APPLICATION PROGRAMS 585
KEYBOARD
562
MOUSE
561
563
556
555
552
551
541
500
OPERATING SYSTEM 544
APPLICATION PROGRAMS 545
OTHER PROGRAM MODULES 546
PROGRAM DATA 547

FIG. 5

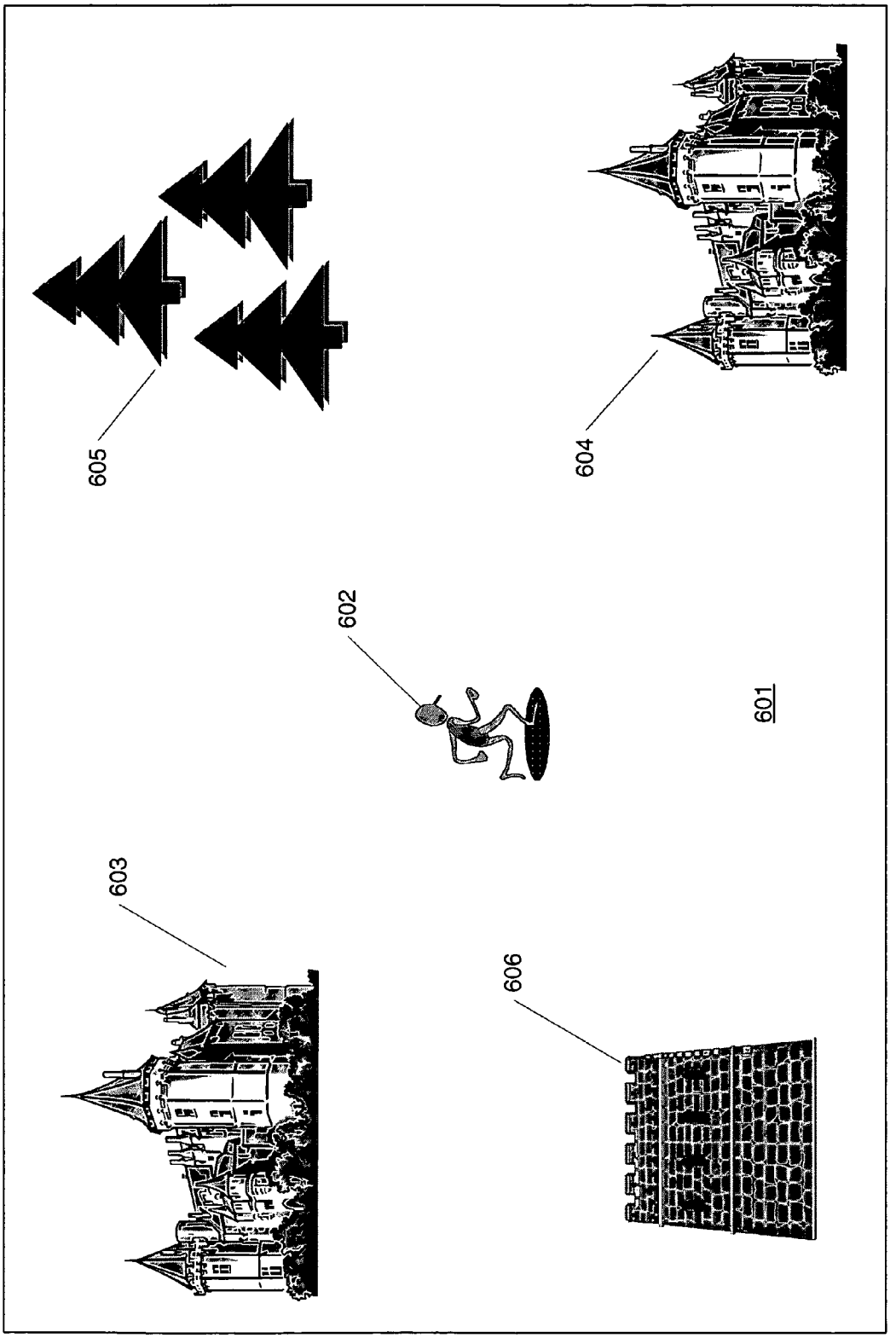


FIG. 6

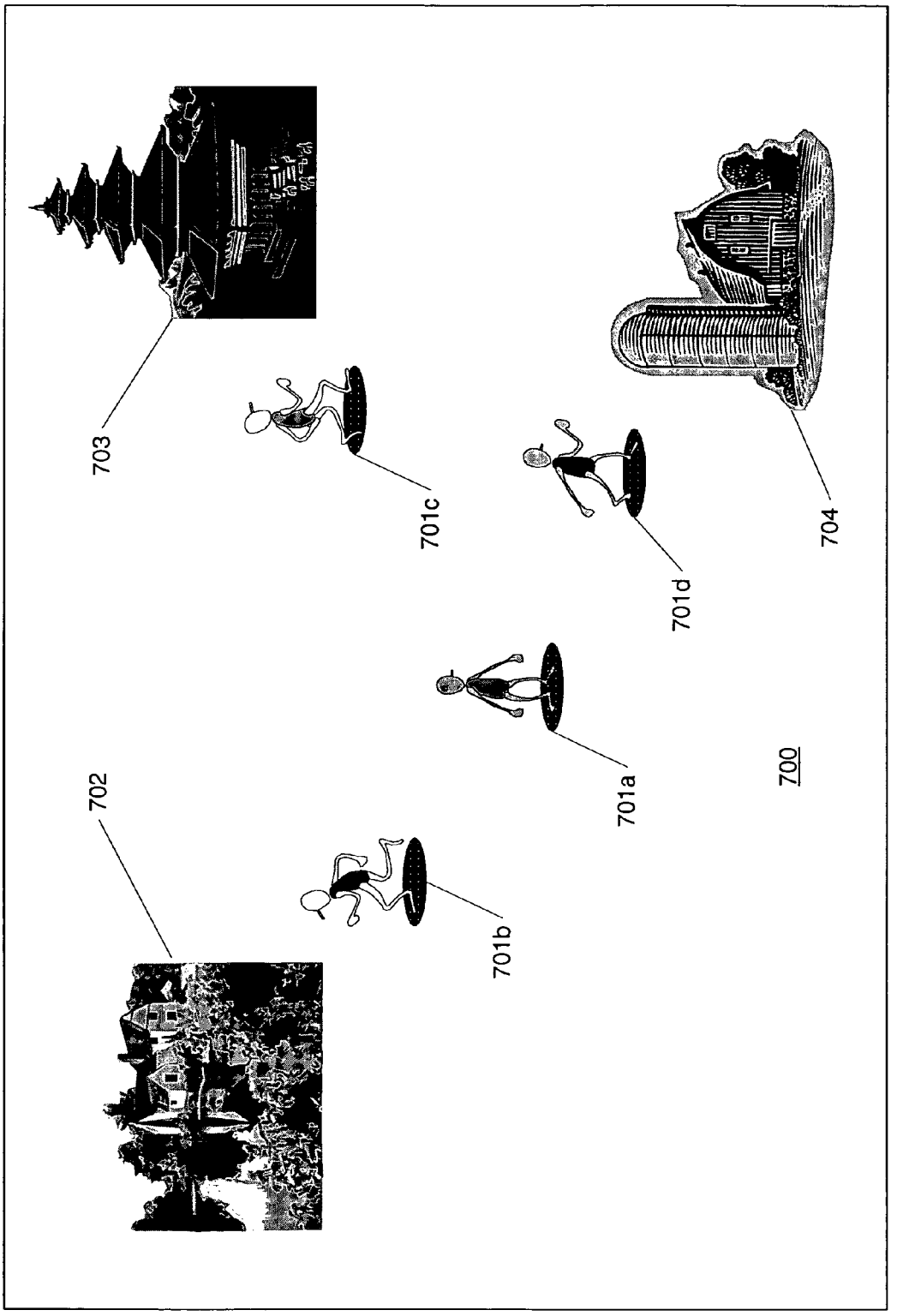


FIG. 7

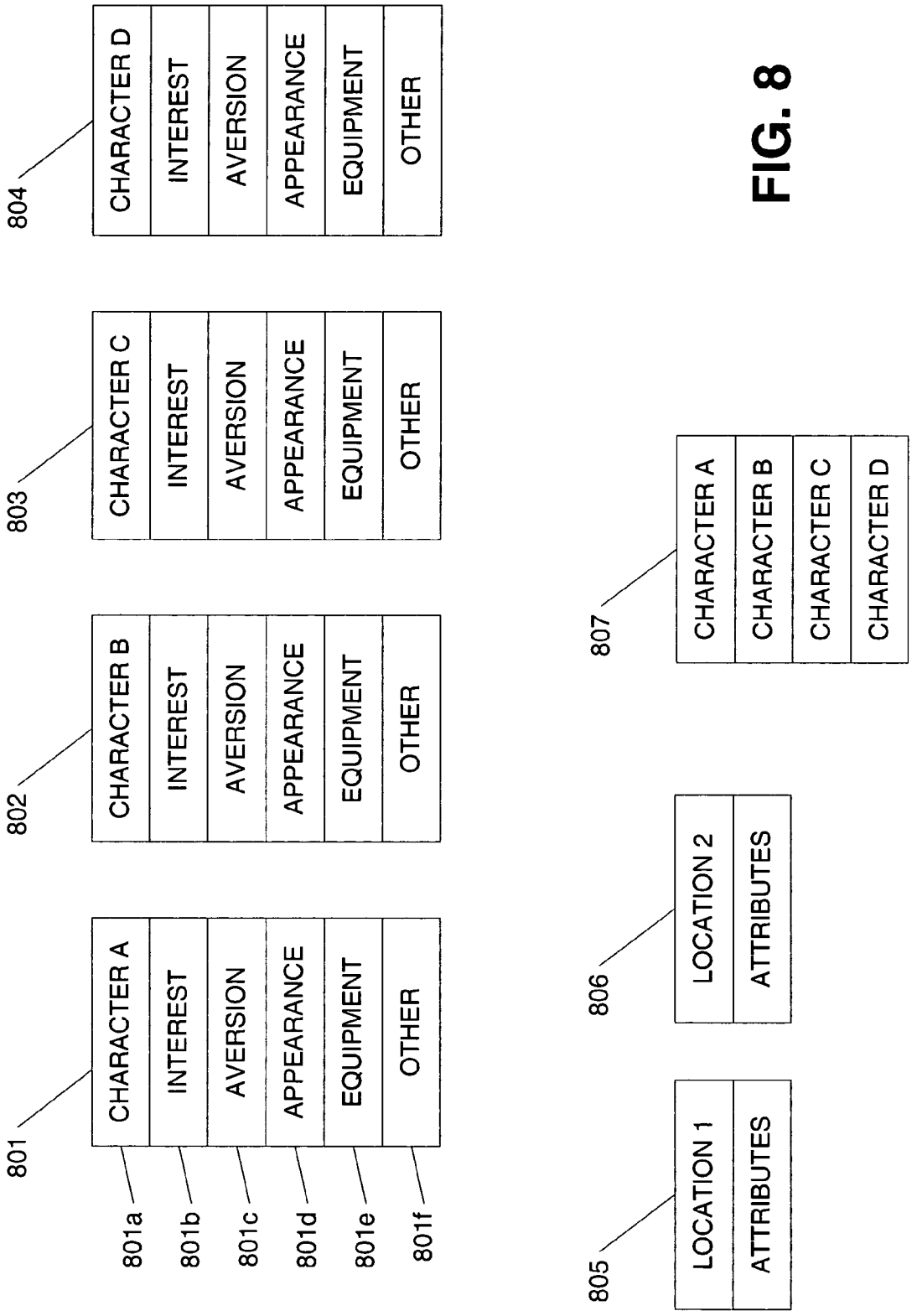

801
CHARACTER A
INTEREST
AVERSION
APPEARANCE
EQUIPMENT
OTHER
801a
801b
801c
801d
801e
801f
802
CHARACTER B
INTEREST
AVERSION
APPEARANCE
EQUIPMENT
OTHER
803
CHARACTER C
INTEREST
AVERSION
APPEARANCE
EQUIPMENT
OTHER
804
CHARACTER D
INTEREST
AVERSION
APPEARANCE
EQUIPMENT
OTHER
805
LOCATION 1
ATTRIBUTES
806
LOCATION 2
ATTRIBUTES
807
CHARACTER A
CHARACTER B
CHARACTER C
CHARACTER D

FIG. 8

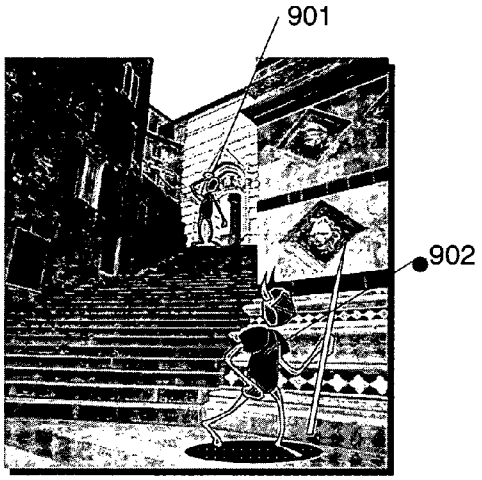


FIG. 9a

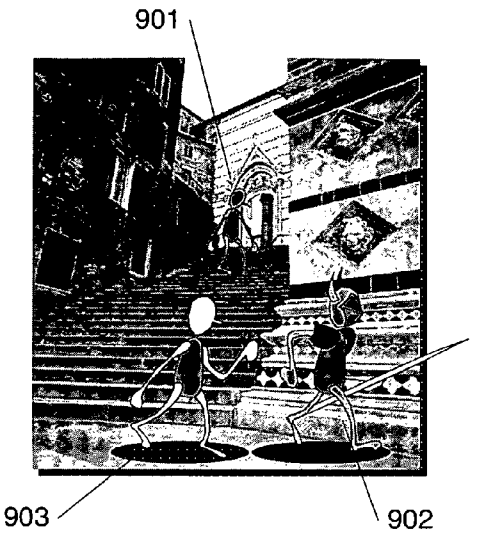


FIG. 9b

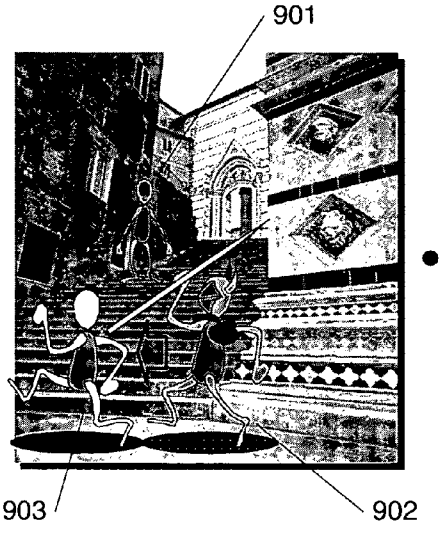


FIG. 9c

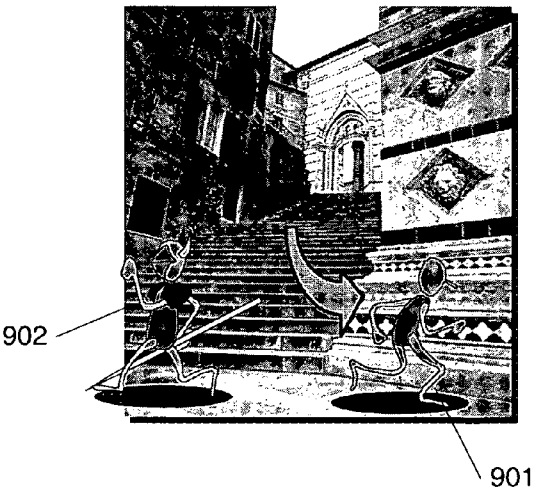


FIG. 9d

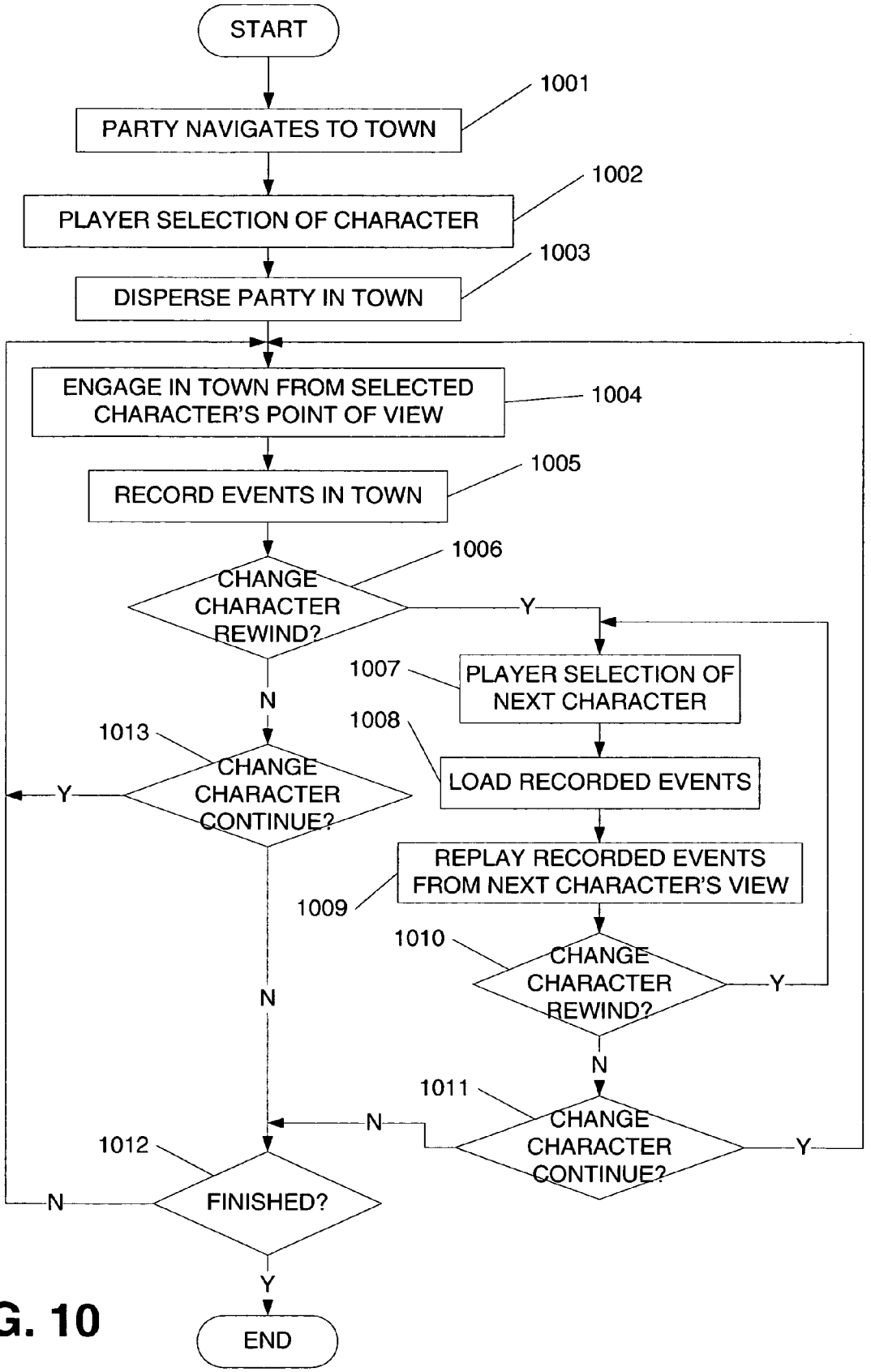

START
1001
PARTY NAVIGATES TO TOWN
1002
PLAYER SELECTION OF CHARACTER
1003
DISPERSE PARTY IN TOWN
ENGAGE IN TOWN FROM SELECTED CHARACTER'S POINT OF VIEW
1004
1005
RECORD EVENTS IN TOWN
1006
CHANGE CHARACTER REWIND?
Y
N
1007
PLAYER SELECTION OF NEXT CHARACTER
1008
LOAD RECORDED EVENTS
1013
CHANGE CHARACTER CONTINUE?
Y
REPLAY RECORDED EVENTS FROM NEXT CHARACTER'S VIEW
1009
1010
CHANGE CHARACTER REWIND?
Y
N
1011
CHANGE CHARACTER CONTINUE?
N
Y
1012
FINISHED?
N
Y
END

FIG. 10

ROLE PLAY SYSTEM

BACKGROUND

Computerized role-playing games (RPGs) have secured their place in the video game industry as one of the most popular video game types. The attraction typically comes from a mixture of the overall story (or stories) being told in the game, and the underlying game mechanics (e.g., how the characters are improved as the game progresses, how battles are conducted, etc.).

In some RPGs, the player may be given control over the main character in the story, and additional side characters may join the main character as the story progresses. The side characters may be important to the story as it unfolds, and developers of RPGs typically give considerable thought and attention to the characters (both main and side characters), giving them unique appearances and back stories explaining their history.

Typical RPGs, however, continue to focus on the main character. Some RPGs use a map scene to depict a world in which the game takes place, and the main character is displayed in the map scene. The player may move their main character through the environment shown in the map scene, and may interact with the various creatures, characters and/or objects in the scene. If the main character is accompanied by one or more side characters, forming a party, the side characters do not play significant roles in the map scene, and are not given much attention. When the main character (or party) moves through the map scene and enters a location in the scene, such as a town, the player remains in control of the main character, again largely ignoring the side characters in the party.

SUMMARY

This Summary is provided to introduce a selection of concepts in a simplified form that are further described below in the Detailed Description. This Summary is not intended to identify key features or essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended to be used as an aid in determining the scope of the claimed subject matter.

As described herein, an RPG may display a primary character on a map scene, together with an environment in which the game takes place, and one or more creatures, characters and/or objects with which the player's character may interact. The primary character displayed in the map scene may stand as a representative of an entire party of characters. In some aspects, each character in the party is programmed to have individual characteristics, such as interests, aversions, appearance, equipment, etc. that may have an effect on other creatures/characters/objects in the game.

The player may control the movements of the primary character displayed in the map scene, and upon entering a location on the map scene (e.g., entering a town), the various characters in the party may automatically disperse through the location in accordance with their individual characteristics.

The player may also be given an option to select one of the characters in the party for control while in the location. After a character is selected, the player may then navigate the location and interact with the other creatures/characters/objects in the location using the selected character, and these interactions may depend on the selected character's characteristics (together with characteristics of the creatures/characters/objects being interacted with).

The player may also be given an option to switch control from the selected character to a different character from the party. By switching control, the player may take advantage of the characteristics of the different character to interact with the game's creatures/characters/objects and handle different situations. In some aspects, the player may use the different character to continue an interaction that was initiated by the first selected character.

The game may be programmed to record the movements and actions of the player's selected character during an interaction, and may give the player the option of switching to a different character and replaying the same interaction from the different character's point of view. In this manner, a player may appear to have traveled backwards in time within the game, and may use the different character to alter the first selected character's interaction.

These and other aspects may help provide players with a more enjoyable experience, and are described in greater detail herein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** illustrates a gaming system that may implement one or more of the features described herein.

FIG. **2** illustrates a block diagram of the gaming system shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **3** illustrates a block diagram of a network gaming system that may implement one or more of the features described herein.

FIG. **4** illustrates another block diagram of an online gaming environment that may implement one or more of the features described herein.

FIG. **5** illustrates a block diagram of a general computing system in which one or more features described herein may be implemented.

FIG. **6** illustrates an example map scene showing a primary character.

FIG. **7** illustrates an example location scene in which the player's party disperses through a location entered from the map scene.

FIG. **8** illustrates example data structures and contents that may be stored to facilitate one or more features described herein.

FIGS. **9***a-d* illustrate example screens in which a player switches character control.

FIG. **10** illustrates an example method employing one or more features described herein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following description of the various aspects, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part hereof, and in which is shown by way of illustration various features described herein may be practiced. It is to be understood that other embodiments may be used and structural and functional modifications may be made.

FIG. **1** illustrates an example of a suitable gaming system environment **100** on which computer games, video games, and or other electronic games (collectively referred to herein as computer games) may be played. The gaming system environment **100** is only one example of a suitable computing environment and is not intended to suggest any limitation as to the scope of use or functionality of the features described herein. Neither should the gaming system environment **100** be interpreted as having any dependency or requirement relating to any one or combination of components illustrated in the illustrative operating gaming system environment **100**.

Aspects described herein are operational with numerous other general purpose or special purpose computing system environments or configurations. Examples of well known computing systems, environments, and/or configurations that may be suitable for use include, but are not limited to, personal computers; server computers; portable and hand-held devices such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), tablet PCs or laptop PCs; multiprocessor systems; microprocessor-based systems; set top boxes; programmable consumer electronics; network PCs; minicomputers; mainframe computers; electronic game consoles, distributed computing environments that include any of the above systems or devices; and the like.

Aspects herein may be described in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules, being executed by a computer. Generally, program modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. The features described herein may also be practiced in distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a communications network. In a distributed computing environment, program modules may be located in both local and remote computer storage media including memory storage devices.

FIG. **1** shows an exemplary gaming system **100**. Gaming system **100** may include a game console **102** and multiple controllers, as represented by controllers **104**(**1**) and **104**(**2**). The game console **102** is equipped with an internal hard disk drive and a portable media drive **106** that supports various forms of portable storage media as represented by optical storage disc **108**. Examples of suitable portable storage media include DVD, CD-ROM, game discs, and so forth.

Game console **102** has four slots **110** on its front face to support up to four controllers, although the number and arrangement of slots may be modified. A power button **112** and an eject button **114** are also positioned on the front face of the game console **102**. The power button **112** switches power to the game console and the eject button **114** alternately opens and closes a tray of the portable media drive **106** to allow insertion and extraction of the storage disc **108**.

Game console **102** may connect to a television or other display (not shown) via A/V interfacing cables **120**. A power cable **122** provides power to the game console. Game console **102** may further be configured with broadband network capabilities, as represented by the cable or modem connector **124** to facilitate access to a network, such as the Internet.

Each controller **104** may be coupled to the game console **102** via a wire or wireless interface. In the illustrated implementation, the controllers are USB (Universal Serial Bus) compatible and are connected to the console **102** via USB cables **130**. Controller **102** may be equipped with any of a wide variety of user interaction mechanisms. As illustrated in FIG. **1**, each controller **104** is equipped with two thumbsticks **132**(**1**) and **132**(**2**), a D-pad **134**, buttons **136** (e.g., 'A', 'B', 'X', 'Y'), and two triggers **138**. These mechanisms are merely representative, and other known gaming mechanisms may be substituted for or added to those shown in FIG. **1**.

A memory unit (MU) **140** may be inserted into the controller **104** to provide additional and portable storage. Portable memory units enable users to store game parameters and user accounts, and port them for play on other consoles. In the described implementation, each controller is configured to accommodate two memory units **140**, although more or less than two units may be employed in other implementations. A headset **142** may be connected to the controller **104** or game console **102** to provide audio communication capabilities. Headset **142** may include a microphone for audio input and one or more speakers for audio output.

Gaming system **100** is capable of playing, for example, games, music, and videos. With the different storage offerings, titles can be played from the hard disk drive or the portable medium **108** in drive **106**, from an online source, or from a memory unit **140**. For security, in some embodiments executable code can only be run from the portable medium **108**. A sample of what gaming system **100** is capable of playing include game titles played from CD and DVD discs, from the hard disk drive, or from an online source; digital music played from a CD in the portable media drive **106**, from a file on the hard disk drive (e.g., Windows Media Audio (WMA) format), or from online streaming sources; and digital audio/video played from a DVD disc in the portable media drive **106**, from a file on the hard disk drive (e.g., Active Streaming Format), or from online streaming sources.

FIG. **2** shows functional components of the gaming system **100** in more detail. The game console **102** has a central processing unit (CPU) **200** and a memory controller **202** that facilitates processor access to various types of memory, including a flash ROM (Read Only Memory) **204**, a RAM (Random Access Memory) **206**, a hard disk drive **208**, and the portable media drive **106**. The CPU **200** is equipped with a level 1 cache **210** and a level 2 cache **212** to temporarily store data and hence reduce the number of memory access cycles, thereby improving processing speed and throughput.

The CPU **200**, memory controller **202**, and various memory devices are interconnected via one or more buses, including serial and parallel buses, a memory bus, a peripheral bus, and a processor or local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures. By way of example, such architectures can include an Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, a Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) bus, an Enhanced ISA (EISA) bus, a Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA) local bus, and a Peripheral Component Interconnects (PCI) bus also known as a Mezzanine bus.

As one suitable implementation, the CPU **200**, memory controller **202**, ROM **204**, and RAM **206** are integrated onto a common module **214**. In this implementation, ROM **204** is configured as a flash ROM that is connected to the memory controller **202** and a ROM bus (not shown). RAM **206** is configured as multiple DDR SDRAM (Double Data Rate Synchronous Dynamic RAM) that are independently controlled by the memory controller **202** via separate buses (not shown). The hard disk drive **208** and portable media drive **106** are connected to the memory controller via the PCI bus and an ATA (AT Attachmnent) bus **216**.

A 3D graphics processing unit **220** and a video encoder **222** form a video processing pipeline for high speed and high resolution graphics processing. Data is carried from the graphics processing unit **220** to the video encoder **222** via a digital video bus (not shown). An audio processing unit **224** and an audio codec (coder/decoder) **226** form a corresponding audio processing pipeline with high fidelity and stereo processing. Audio data is carried between the audio processing unit **224** and the audio codec **226** via a communication link (not shown). The video and audio processing pipelines output data to an A/V (audio/video) port **228** for transmission to the television or other display. In the illustrated implementation, the video and audio processing components **220**-**228** are mounted on the module **214**.

Also implemented on the module **214** are a USB host controller **230** and a network interface **232**. The USB host controller **230** is coupled to the CPU **200** and the memory controller **202** via a bus (e.g., PCI bus) and serves as host for the peripheral controllers **104**(**1**)-**104**(**4**). The network inter-

face **232** provides access to a network (e.g., Internet, home network, etc.) and may be any of a wide variety of various wire or wireless interface components including an Ethernet card, a modem, a Bluetooth module, a cable modem, and the like.

The game console **102** has two dual controller support subassemblies **240(1)** and **240(2)**, with each subassembly supporting two game controllers **104(1)-104(4)**. A front panel I/O subassembly **242** supports the functionality of the power button **112** and the eject button **114**, as well as any LEDs (light emitting diodes) or other indicators exposed on the outer surface of the game console. The subassemblies **240(1)**, **240(2)**, and **242** are coupled to the module **214** via one or more cable assemblies **244**.

Eight memory units **140(1)-140(8)** are illustrated as being connectable to the four controllers **104(1)-104(4)**, i.e., two memory units for each controller. Each memory unit **140** offers additional storage on which games, game parameters, and other data may be stored. When inserted into a controller, the memory unit **140** can be accessed by the memory controller **202**.

A system power supply module **250** provides power to the components of the gaming system **100**. A fan **252** cools the circuitry within the game console **102**.

The game console **102** implements a uniform media portal model that provides a consistent user interface and navigation hierarchy to move users through various entertainment areas. The portal model offers a convenient way to access content from multiple different media types—game data, audio data, and video data—regardless of the media type inserted into the portable media drive **106**.

To implement the uniform media portal model, a console user interface (UI) application **260** is stored on the hard disk drive **208**. When the game console is powered on, various portions of the console application **260** are loaded into RAM **206** and/or caches **210**, **212** and executed on the CPU **200**. The console application **260** presents a graphical user interface that provides a consistent user experience when navigating to different media types available on the game console.

The gaming system **100** may be operated as a standalone system by simply connecting the system to a television or other display. In this standalone mode, the gaming system **100** allows one or more players to play games, watch movies, or listen to music. However, with the integration of broadband connectivity made available through the network interface **232**, the gaming system **100** may further be operated as a participant in a larger network gaming community. This network gaming environment is described next.

FIG. **3** shows an exemplary network gaming environment **300** that interconnects multiple gaming systems **100(1)**, . . . , **100(g)** via a network **302**. The network **302** represents any of a wide variety of data communications networks. It may include public portions (e.g., the Internet) as well as private portions (e.g., a residential Local Area Network (LAN)), as well as combinations of public and private portions. Network **302** may be implemented using any one or more of a wide variety of conventional communications media including both wired and wireless media. Any of a wide variety of communications protocols can be used to communicate data via network **302**, including both public and proprietary protocols. Examples of such protocols include TCP/IP, IPX/SPX, NetBEUI, etc.

In addition to gaming systems **100**, one or more online services **304(1)**, . . . , **304(s)** may be accessible via the network **302** to provide various services for the participants, such as hosting online games, serving downloadable music or video files, hosting gaming competitions, serving streaming audio/video files, and the like. The network gaming environment **300** may further involve a key distribution center **306** that plays a role in authenticating individual players and/or gaming systems **100** to one another as well as online services **304**. The distribution center **306** distributes keys and service tickets to valid participants that may then be used to form games amongst multiple players or to purchase services from the online services **304**.

The network gaming environment **300** introduces another memory source available to individual gaming systems **100**—online storage. In addition to the portable storage medium **108**, the hard disk drive **208**, and the memory unit(s) **140**, the gaming system **100(1)** can also access data files available at remote storage locations via the network **302**, as exemplified by remote storage **308** at online service **304(s)**.

FIG. **4** is a block diagram of another illustrative online gaming environment **400**, e.g. XBOX® LIVE by Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Wash. Multiple game consoles **402(1)**, **402(2)**, . . . , **402(n)** are coupled to a security gateway **404** via a network **406**. Each game console **402** can be, for example, a game console **102** of FIG. **1** or FIG. **2**. Network **406** represents any one or more of a variety of conventional data communications networks. Network **406** will typically include packet switched networks, but may also include circuit switched networks. Network **406** can include wire and/or wireless portions. In one exemplary implementation, network **406** includes the Internet and may optionally include one or more local area networks (LANs) and/or wide area networks (WANs). At least a part of network **406** is a public network, which refers to a network that is publicly-accessible. Virtually anyone can access the public network.

In some situations, network **406** includes a LAN (e.g., a home network), with a routing device situated between game console **402** and security gateway **404**. This routing device may perform network address translation (NAT), allowing the multiple devices on the LAN to share the same IP address on the Internet, and also operating as a firewall to protect the device(s) on the LAN from access by malicious or mischievous users via the Internet.

Security gateway **404** operates as a gateway between public network **406** and a private network **408**. Private network **408** can be any of a wide variety of conventional networks, such as a local area network. Private network **408**, as well as other devices discussed in more detail below, is within a data center **410** that operates as a secure zone. Data center **410** is made up of trusted devices communicating via trusted communications. Thus, encryption and authentication within secure zone **410** is not necessary. The private nature of network **408** refers to the restricted accessibility of network **408**—access to network **408** is restricted to only certain individuals (e.g., restricted by the owner or operator of data center **410**).

Security gateway **404** is a cluster of one or more security gateway computing devices. These security gateway computing devices collectively implement security gateway **404**. Security gateway **404** may optionally include one or more conventional load balancing devices that operate to direct requests to be handled by the security gateway computing devices to appropriate ones of those computing devices. This directing or load balancing is performed in a manner that attempts to balance the load on the various security gateway computing devices approximately equally (or alternatively in accordance with some other criteria).

Also within data center **410** are: one or more monitoring servers **412**; one or more presence and notification front doors **414**, one or more presence servers **416**, one or more notification servers **418**, and a profile store **428** (collectively imple-

menting a presence and notification service or system **430**); one or more match front doors **420** and one or more match servers **422** (collectively implementing a match service); and one or more statistics front doors **424** and one or more statistics servers **426** (collectively implementing a statistics service). The servers **416**, **418**, **422**, and **426** provide services to game consoles **402**, and thus can be referred to as service devices. Other service devices may also be included in addition to, and/or in place of, one or more of the servers **416**, **418**, **422**, and **426**. Additionally, although only one data center is shown in FIG. **4**, alternatively multiple data centers may exist with which game consoles **402** can communicate. These data centers may operate independently, or alternatively may operate collectively (e.g., to make one large data center available to game consoles **102**,**402**).

Game consoles **402** are situated remotely from data center **410**, and access data center **410** via network **406**. A game console **402** desiring to communicate with one or more devices in the data center logs in to the data center and establishes a secure communication channel between the console **402** and security gateway **404**. Game console **402** and security gateway **404** encrypt and authenticate data packets being passed back and forth, thereby allowing the data packets to be securely transmitted between them without being understood by any other device that may capture or copy the data packets without breaking the encryption. Each data packet communicated from game console **402** to security gateway **404**, or from security gateway **404** to game console **402** can have data embedded therein. This embedded data is referred to as the content or data content of the packet. Additional information may also be inherently included in the packet based on the packet type (e.g., a heartbeat packet).

The secure communication channel between a console **402** and security gateway **404** is based on a security ticket. Console **402** authenticates itself and the current user(s) of console **402** to a key distribution center **428** and obtains, from key distribution center **428**, a security ticket. Console **402** then uses this security ticket to establish the secure communication channel with security gateway **404**. In establishing the secure communication channel with security gateway **404**, the game console **402** and security gateway **404** authenticate themselves to one another and establish a session security key that is known only to that particular game console **402** and the security gateway **404**. This session security key is used to encrypt data transferred between the game console **402** and the security gateway cluster **404**, so no other devices (including other game consoles **402**) can read the data. The session security key is also used to authenticate a data packet as being from the security gateway **404** or game console **402** that the data packet alleges to be from. Thus, using such session security keys, secure communication channels can be established between the security gateway **404** and the various game consoles **402**.

Once the secure communication channel is established between a game console **402** and the security gateway **404**, encrypted data packets can be securely transmitted between the two. When the game console **402** desires to send data to a particular service device in data center **410**, the game console **402** encrypts the data and sends it to security gateway **404** requesting that it be forwarded to the particular service device (s) targeted by the data packet. Security gateway **404** receives the data packet and, after authenticating and decrypting the data packet, encapsulates the data content of the packet into another message to be sent to the appropriate service via private network **408**. Security gateway **404** determines the appropriate service for the message based on the requested service(s) targeted by the data packet.

Similarly, when a service device in data center **410** desires to communicate data to a game console **402**, the data center sends a message to security gateway **404**, via private network **408**, including the data content to be sent to the game console **402** as well as an indication of the particular game console **402** to which the data content is to be sent. Security gateway **404** embeds the data content into a data packet, and then encrypts the data packet so it can only be decrypted by the particular game console **402** and also authenticates the data packet as being from the security gateway **404**.

Although discussed herein as primarily communicating encrypted data packets between security gateway **404** and a game console **402**, alternatively some data packets may be partially encrypted (some portions of the data packets are encrypted while other portions are not encrypted). Which portions of the data packets are encrypted and which are not can vary based on the desires of the designers of data center **410** and/or game consoles **402**. For example, the designers may choose to allow voice data to be communicated among consoles **402** so that users of the consoles **402** can talk to one another—the designers may further choose to allow the voice data to be unencrypted while any other data in the packets is encrypted. Additionally, in another alternative, some data packets may have no portions that are encrypted (that is, the entire data packet is unencrypted). It should be noted that, even if a data packet is unencrypted or only partially encrypted, all of the data packet can still be authenticated.

Each security gateway device in security gateway **404** is responsible for the secure communication channel with typically one or more game consoles **402**, and thus each security gateway device can be viewed as being responsible for managing or handling one or more game consoles. The various security gateway devices may be in communication with each other and communicate messages to one another. For example, a security gateway device that needs to send a data packet to a game console that it is not responsible for managing may send a message to all the other security gateway devices with the data to be sent to that game console. This message is received by the security gateway device that is responsible for managing that game console and sends the appropriate data to that game console. Alternatively, the security gateway devices may be aware of which game consoles are being handled by which security gateway devices - this may be explicit, such as each security gateway device maintaining a table of game consoles handled by the other security gateway devices, or alternatively implicit, such as determining which security gateway device is responsible for a particular game console based on an identifier of the game console.

Monitoring server(s) **412** operate to inform devices in data center **410** of an unavailable game console **402** or an unavailable security gateway device of security gateway **404**. Game consoles **402** can become unavailable for a variety of different reasons, such as a hardware or software failure, the console being powered-down without logging out of data center **410**, the network connection cable to console **402** being disconnected from console **402**, other network problems (e.g., the LAN that the console **402** is on malfunctioning), etc. Similarly, a security gateway device of security gateway **404** can become unavailable for a variety of different reasons, such as hardware or software failure, the device being powered-down, the network connection cable to the device being disconnected from the device, other network problems, etc.

Each of the security gateway devices in security gateway **404** is monitored by one or more monitoring servers **412**, which detect when one of the security gateway devices becomes unavailable. In the event a security gateway device

becomes unavailable, monitoring server **412** sends a message to each of the other devices in data center **410** (servers, front doors, etc.) that the security gateway device is no longer available. Each of the other devices can operate based on this information as it sees fit (e.g., it may assume that particular game consoles being managed by the security gateway device are no longer in communication with data center **410** and perform various clean-up operations accordingly). Alternatively, only certain devices may receive such a message from the monitoring server **412** (e.g., only those devices that are concerned with whether security gateway devices are available).

Security gateway **404** monitors the individual game consoles **402** and detects when one of the game consoles **402** becomes unavailable. When security gateway **404** detects that a game console is no longer available, security gateway **404** sends a message to monitoring server **412** identifying the unavailable game console. In response, monitoring server **412** sends a message to each of the other devices in data center **410** (or alternatively only selected devices) that the game console is no longer available. Each of the other devices can then operate based on this information as it sees fit.

Presence server(s) **416** hold and process data concerning the status or presence of a given user logged in to data center **410** for online gaming. Notification server(s) **418** maintains multiple notification queues of outgoing messages destined for a player logged in to data center **410**. Presence and notification front door **414** is one or more server devices that operate as an intermediary between security gateway **404** and servers **416** and **418**. One or more load balancing devices (not shown) may be included in presence and notification front door **414** to balance the load among the multiple server devices operating as front door **414**. Security gateway **404** communicates messages for servers **416** and **418** to the front door **414**, and the front door **414** identifies which particular server **416** or particular server **418** the message is to be communicated to. By using front door **414**, the actual implementation of servers **416** and **418**, such as which servers are responsible for managing data regarding which users, is abstracted from security gateway **404**. Security gateway **404** can simply forward messages that target the presence and notification service to presence and notification front door **414** and rely on front door **414** to route the messages to the appropriate one of server(s) **416** and server(s) **418**.

Match server(s) **422** hold and process data concerning the matching of online players to one another. An online user is able to advertise a game available for play along with various characteristics of the game (e.g., the location where a football game will be played, whether a game is to be played during the day or at night, the user's skill level, etc.). These various characteristics can then be used as a basis to match up different online users to play games together. Match front door **420** includes one or more server devices (and optionally a load balancing device(s)) and operates to abstract match server(s) **422** from security gateway **404** in a manner analogous to front door **414** abstracting server(s) **416** and server(s) **418**.

Statistics server(s) **426** hold and process data concerning various statistics for online games. The specific statistics used can vary based on the game designer's desires (e.g., the top ten scores or times, a world ranking for all online players of the game, a list of users who have found the most items or spent the most time playing, etc.). Statistics front door **426** includes one or more server devices (and optionally a load balancing device(s)) and operates to abstract statistics server (s) **426** from security gateway **404** in a manner analogous to front door **414** abstracting server(s) **416** and server(s) **418**.

Thus, it can be seen that security gateway **404** operates to shield devices in the secure zone of data center **410** from the untrusted, public network **406**. Communications within the secure zone of data center **410** need not be encrypted, as all devices within data center **410** are trusted. However, any information to be communicated from a device within data center **410** to a game console **402** passes through security gateway cluster **404**, where it is encrypted in such a manner that it can be decrypted by only the game console **402** targeted by the information.

One or more features described herein may be embodied in computer-executable instructions (i.e., software) stored in RAM memory **206**, non-volatile memory **108**, **208**, **308**, or any other resident memory on game console **102**. Generally, software modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types when executed by a processor in a computer or other device. The computer executable instructions may be stored on a computer readable medium such as one or more hard disks **208**, removable storage media **108** (e.g., CD-ROM, DVD, disk, etc.), solid state memory, RAM **206**, etc. As will be appreciated by one of skill in the art, the functionality of the software modules may be combined or distributed as desired in various embodiments. In addition, the functionality may be embodied in whole or in part in firmware or hardware equivalents such as application specific integrated circuits (ASIC), field programmable gate arrays (FPGA), and the like.

Aspects herein are not limited to console computing environments. Indeed, these aspects may also be implemented in video games that operate on personal computers (PC). FIG. **5** illustrates an example of a suitable computing system environment **500** on which the features described herein may be implemented. The computing system environment **500** is only one example of a suitable computing environment and is not intended to suggest any limitation as to the scope of use or functionality of the features described herein. Neither should the computing environment **500** be interpreted as having any dependency or requirement relating to any one or combination of components illustrated in the exemplary operating environment **500**.

The features herein are operational with numerous other general purpose or special purpose computing system environments or configurations. Examples of well known computing systems, environments, and/or configurations that may be suitable for use include, but are not limited to, personal computers, server computers, hand-held or laptop devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor-based systems, set top boxes, programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, distributed computing environments that include any of the above systems or devices, and the like.

The features herein may be described in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules, being executed by a computer. Generally, program modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc., that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. The features may also be practiced in distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a communications network. In a distributed computing environment, program modules may be located in both local and remote computer storage media including memory storage devices.

With reference to FIG. **5**, an exemplary system for implementing the features described herein includes a general purpose computing device in the form of a computer **510**. Com-

ponents of computer **510** may include, but are not limited to, a processing unit **520**, a system memory **530**, and a system bus **521** that couples various system components including the system memory to the processing unit **520**. The system bus **521** may be any of several types of bus structures including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, and a local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures. By way of example, and not limitation, such architectures include Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) bus, Enhanced ISA (EISA) bus, Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA) local bus, and Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) bus also known as Mezzanine bus.

Computer **510** typically includes a variety of computer readable media. Computer readable media can be any available media that can be accessed by computer **510** and includes both volatile and nonvolatile media, removable and non-removable media. By way of example, and not limitation, computer readable media may comprise computer storage media and communication media. Computer storage media includes both volatile and nonvolatile, and removable and non-removable media implemented in any method or technology for storage of information such as computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules or other data. Computer storage media includes, but is not limited to, RAM, ROM, EEPROM, flash memory or other memory technology, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical disk storage, magnetic cassettes, magnetic tape, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices (in the singular or the plural), or any other medium which can be used to store the desired information and which can accessed by computer **510**. Communication media typically embodies computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules or other data in a modulated data signal such as a carrier wave or other transport mechanism and includes any information delivery media. The term "modulated data signal" means a signal that has one or more of its characteristics set or changed in such a manner as to encode information in the signal. By way of example, and not limitation, communication media includes wired media such as a wired network or direct-wired connection, and wireless media such as acoustic, RF, infrared and other wireless media. Combinations of the any of the above should also be included within the scope of computer readable media.

The system memory **530** includes computer storage media in the form of volatile and/or nonvolatile memory such as read only memory (ROM) **531** and random access memory (RAM) **532**. A basic input/output system **533** (BIOS), containing the basic routines that help to transfer information between elements within computer **510**, such as during start-up, is typically stored in ROM **531**. RAM **532** typically contains data and/or program modules that are immediately accessible to and/or presently being operated on by processing unit **520**. By way of example, and not limitation, FIG. **5** illustrates operating system **534**, application programs **535**, other program modules **536**, and program data **537**.

The computer **510** may also include other removable/non-removable, volatile/nonvolatile computer storage media. By way of example only, FIG. **5** illustrates a hard disk drive **541** that reads from or writes to non-removable, nonvolatile magnetic media, a magnetic disk drive **551** that reads from or writes to a removable, nonvolatile magnetic disk **552**, and an optical disk drive **555** that reads from or writes to a removable, nonvolatile optical disk **556** such as a CD ROM or other optical media. Other removable/non-removable, volatile/nonvolatile computer storage media that can be used in the exemplary operating environment include, but are not limited to, magnetic tape cassettes, flash memory cards, digital versatile disks, digital video tape, solid state RAM, solid state ROM, and the like. The hard disk drive **541** is typically connected to the system bus **521** through a non-removable memory interface such as interface **540**, and magnetic disk drive **551** and optical disk drive **555** are typically connected to the system bus **521** by a removable memory interface, such as interface **550**.

The drives and their associated computer storage media discussed above and illustrated in FIG. **5**, provide storage of computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules and other data for the computer **510**. In FIG. **5**, for example, hard disk drive **541** is illustrated as storing operating system **544**, application programs **545**, other program modules **546**, and program data **547**. Note that these components can either be the same as or different from operating system **534**, application programs **535**, other program modules **536**, and program data **537**. Operating system **544**, application programs **545**, other program modules **546**, and program data **547** are given different numbers here to illustrate that, at a minimum, they are different copies. A user may enter commands and information into the computer through input devices such as a keyboard **562** and pointing device **561**, commonly referred to as a mouse, trackball or touch pad. Other input devices (not shown) may include a microphone, joystick, game pad, satellite dish, scanner, or the like. These and other input devices are often connected to the processing unit **520** through a user input interface **560** that is coupled to the system bus, but may be connected by other interface and bus structures, such as a parallel port, game port or a universal serial bus (USB). A monitor **591** or other type of display device is also connected to the system bus **521** via an interface, such as a video interface **590**. In addition to the monitor, computers may also include other peripheral output devices such as speakers **597** and printer **596**, which may be connected through an output peripheral interface **595**.

The computer **510** may operate in a networked environment using logical connections to one or more remote computers, such as a remote computer **580**. The remote computer **580** may be a personal computer, a server, a router, a network PC, a peer device or other common network node, and typically includes many or all of the elements described above relative to the computer **510**, although only a memory storage device **581** has been illustrated in FIG. **5**. The logical connections depicted in FIG. **5** include a local area network (LAN) **571** and a wide area network (WAN) **573**, but may also include other networks. Such networking environments are commonplace in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks, intranets and the Internet.

When used in a LAN networking environment, the computer **510** is connected to the LAN **571** through a network interface or adapter **570**. When used in a WAN networking environment, the computer **510** typically includes a modem **572** or other means for establishing communications over the WAN **573**, such as the Internet. The modem **572**, which may be internal or external, may be connected to the system bus **521** via the user input interface **560**, or other appropriate mechanism. In a networked environment, program modules depicted relative to the computer **510**, or portions thereof, may be stored in the remote memory storage device. By way of example, and not limitation, FIG. **5** illustrates remote application programs **585** as residing on memory device **581**. It will be appreciated that the network connections shown are exemplary and other means of establishing a communications link between the computers may be used.

FIG. **6** illustrates an example map scene for a video game, such as an RPG. In the map scene **601**, an icon **602** represent-

ing the player's character may be displayed. The icon **602** may represent an individual character in the game's story, or it may represent a plurality of characters that form a party. The indicia **602** may be controlled by the player to move about the scene **601** and interact with various elements in the game environment. For example, the map scene **601** may include a plurality of icons representing various locations in the game's world, such as an icon **603** representing a first town, a second icon **604** representing a second town, a third icon **605** representing a forest, and a fourth icon **606** representing a fortification. Any number of icons may be shown on the map scene **601**, depending on the story's content.

The character **602** may be moved about the map scene **601** under the player's control. For example, by pressing directional buttons on controller **104**, the character **602** may move in a corresponding direction in the scene **601**, and may approach one or more locations (e.g., icons **603-606**) to enter the location.

Upon entering a location, such as town **604**, the RPG may change scenes to display a location scene **700**, as shown in FIG. **7**. The location scene **700** may show a closer, more detailed, view of town **604**, and may include icons **702-704** representing areas within town **604** with which the player's characters may interact. As noted above, the player's party may comprise a plurality of individual characters, and upon entering a location, the party may disperse. As shown in FIG. **7**, a plurality of icons **701***a-d* may be displayed, corresponding to the various characters in the player's party, and the various characters may be shown to be dispersing to various areas within town **604** by, for example, animation, fading, etc.

The dispersal may be based on attributes of the individual characters. For example, a character who is a drunkard might automatically move towards the town pub or bar. A religious character **701***c* might go to the town's temple **703**. The various preferences and inclinations of the characters may be stored as data structures in the game device's memory, such as RAM **206**, disk drive **208**, system memory **530**, etc. The data structures may be in any form, and may contain the types of data shown in FIG. **8**. For example, there may be a data record (**801-804**) for each of four characters in the player's party. The records may store a character identification **801***a* (e.g., a character name). The records may store character interest **801***b* information, which may identify particular interests of the character, such as types of objects, areas, creatures, personalities, etc. that may attract the character. The interest information may identify types of interest, as well as a degree of interest (e.g., weak interest, strong interest, etc.). Similarly, the records may also store aversion information **801***c*, identifying aversions of the character, such as types of objects, areas, creatures, personalities, etc. that the character does not like, and may also identify a degree of aversion (e.g., weak diversion, strong diversion, etc.). The records may also store appearance information **801***d*, identifying the physical appearance of the character (e.g., skin color, hair, eye, etc.), equipment information **801***e* identifying the equipment carried by and/or equipped by the character, and other information **801***f* identifying any other desired attribute of the character.

The RPG may also store data structures **805**, **806** identifying attributes of the various elements in the location, such as areas of town. For example, a first location **805** may correspond to a temple **703**, and the location data structure may indicate this location type. By comparing the character attributes with the location attributes, the RPG may automatically determine which location or area a particular character would like to visit upon entering a town.

When the character **602** enters the location, such as town **604**, the player may be given the option of selecting a character from the party to control. For example, the player may be presented with a list of the available characters, and the player may choose one to control while in the town. While in the location or town, the player may be given the option of dynamically switching control to one of the other characters in the party. For example, the system may store a character data structure **807** listing the party characters, and by pressing a predetermined button on controller **104**, the player may switch control to the next character in the list.

Switching control between characters may allow the player to experience a given event from a different point of view. For example, if the player is using a first character and encounters an obstacle, the player can switch control to another character to help in the situation. FIGS. **9***a-d* illustrate an example sequence of screens in which this occurs. First, in FIG. **9***a*, the player's character **901** may encounter an enemy security guard **902** that the character **901** cannot pass. By switching control to a second character **903**, the player can bring the second character **903** into the scene to distract the guard **902**, as shown in FIG. **9***b*. The player may direct the second character **903** to lure the guard **902** away from his post, as shown in FIG. **9***c*. With the guard **902** away from his post, the player may then switch control back to the first character **901** to proceed past, unhindered by the guard **902**.

In the example shown in FIGS. **9***a-d*, the scene continued to move forward in time after the player switched characters. After switching characters, the first character **901** may simply remain in position until the player switches back to controlling that character. Alternatively, when the player switches characters, the player may elect to travel backwards in time and replay a scene that had previously occurred. For example, had the player attempted to pass guard **902** using character **901**, and been unsuccessful (e.g., the guard captures character **901** and places him under arrest), the player may be given the option to switch control to a different character **903** and travel backwards in time to witness the first character **901**'s unsuccessful attempt, and to try and interfere with that unsuccessful attempt to change its outcome.

This may be accomplished by first recording data identifying the various actions taken by the first character **901** and the guard **902** in the first interaction attempt. Then, when the player switches to character **903**, the system can load this recorded data to display the character **901** and guard **902** during the previous interaction, and the player (now in control of second character **902**) may move and interact with the previously-recorded scene. Of course, the recorded scene need not occur exactly as it occurred the first time, and the character **901** and/or guard **902** may react to new actions taken by the second character **903**. For example, the second time through the interaction, the player may cause character **903** to bump into guard **902** as the guard is capturing character **901**, and then cause character **903** to run away. If the guard **902** proceeds to chase character **903**, instead of continuing to arrest character **901**, the player may then switch control back to player **901** and move that character on through the gate.

FIG. **10** illustrates an example method in which one or more of the various features described herein may be implemented. In step **1001**, the player may control an icon **602** representing a party of characters, and move the icon through the map scene **601** to enter a town, such as town **604**. In step **1002**, the player may be given the option of choosing which character in the party the player wishes to control while in the town. This may be done, for example, by displaying a list of available characters to the user and receiving a selection of one.

When the player has selected a character to control, the system may move to step **1003** and show the dispersal of the characters in the party. The characters that were not selected to be controlled by the player may be automatically directed to the areas in town that are most suitable to the character's preferences (e.g., the interests and aversions described above). Then, in step **1004**, the player may control the selected character and move about the town under the player's control, interacting with various creatures/characters/objects as desired by the player. During this interaction, the player will be viewing events from the point of view of the first selected character.

In step **1005** (which may alternatively be done as part of step **1004**), the various actions of the player and the selected character may be recorded in the system's memory. This recording may store the commands, directions, and actions of the player's controlled character and of the various creatures/characters/objects that the player interacted with.

In step **1006**, the system may check to see if the player has entered a command indicating that a change in character and a rewind in time are desired. This may occur when, for example, the player wishes to replay a prior scene from a different character's point of view. If the player wishes to have such a change, the player may select the next character in step **1007**. In step **1008**, the system may load the previously-recorded data for the player's prior interaction (e.g., the character **901**'s unsuccessful attempt to get past guard **902**, described above). With the prior interaction loaded, the process may move to step **1009**, in which the player has the opportunity to replay the prior scene from a different character's point of view. For example, during this replaying of the scene, the player may control the different character and attempt to interrupt or alter the prior scene (e.g., the distraction of the guard **902** described above).

The rewinding and replaying of a scene can occur multiple times. In step **1010**, the system may check to see if the user wishes to try the 'scene again from yet another character's point of view. For example, the prior step **1009** may also include a recording of the prior scene, recording the initial attempt (e.g., from step **1004**) as well as the different character's attempt (e.g., from step **1009**). If, in step **1010**, the player wishes to switch to another character (e.g., the same character used in step **1004**, or a completely different character), the system may return to step **1007** to retry the scene from a different character's perspective.

If, in step **1010**, the player did not wish to rewind time, the system may check in step **1011** to determine whether the player wished to switch characters and continue the current time line, thereby continuing the scene from its current position. If the player wishes to make such a change, the process may return to step **1004** to continue the scene. If the player did not wish to change characters, then the process may move to step **1012** to determine whether the player is finished with the given scene. If the player is finished, the process ends. If the player is not finished, the process returns to step **1004** to continue the scene.

If, in step **1006**, the player did not wish to rewind time, the process may move to step **1013** to check whether the player wishes to change characters and continue the scene. If the player wished to continue, the process may return to step **1004** to do so. If the player did not, the process may move to step **1012** to determine whether the player is finished with the current scene, as described above.

By allowing players to switch between characters, the RPG may provide for a more engaging experience. To facilitate this, the game software may include cutscene data to show a single interaction or event from the point of view of many different characters. The system may simply select a cutscene according to the controlled character's identity. To allow interactive replays of prior interactions, the system may store prior interactions in a manner that permits alterations when the interactions are replayed. For example, the system may store predefined behavior algorithms for the characters in the scene, and may store commands to cause the characters to perform as with the initial interaction. Then, when the interaction is replayed, the same commands may be supplied to the behavior algorithms, but if the player causes a second character to interrupt or alter those commands, the resulting behavior (and the interaction) will change in response.

The features described above are preferably encoded in computer software as executable instructions that can be executed on a computing device, such as a personal computer or video game console, to result in the display of the screens shown in the figures. The executable instructions may be stored on a computer-readable medium, such as one or more computer disks, RAMs, CD-ROMs, DVDs, game cartridges, etc. Also, although various features are described above, it is not necessary to practice them all in the same embodiment. Instead, various combinations and subcombinations may be implemented as desired, and the true scope of the present invention should only be limited by the claims that follow.

Although the subject matter has been described in language specific to structural features and/or methodological acts, it is to be understood that the subject matter defined in the appended claims is not necessarily limited to the specific features or acts described above. Rather, the specific features and acts described above are disclosed as example forms of implementing the claims.

We claim the following:

1. One or more computer-readable media storing computer-executable instructions for performing the following steps in a video game:

displaying a map scene in a role-playing-game, including a single player-controlled icon, the single player-controlled icon representing a plurality of characters;

receiving a user request to move the single player-controlled icon into a location on the map scene;

in response to the single player-controlled icon entering the location on the map scene, displaying a closer view of the location on the map scene, the closer view including a plurality of different areas in the location on the map scene;

accessing stored preference information for each of the plurality of characters; and

automatically dispersing the plurality of characters to the different areas in the location on the map scene, the dispersal being based at least in part on the preference information;

receiving a user identification of a selected first one of the plurality of characters for control in at least one of the different areas;

involving the first character in a first interaction in the at least one of the different areas;

recording the first interaction involving the first character;

receiving, following the first interaction, a user command to switch control to a second one of the plurality of characters and to rewind time to replay the first interaction from the second character's point of view; and

receiving user commands to involve the second character in a second interaction, the user commands controlling the second character to alter a previous outcome of the first interaction.

2. The media of claim **1**, further comprising instructions for receiving another user request to replay the second interaction

using a third character, and replaying the second interaction in response to the another user request.

3. One or more computer-readable media storing computer-executable instructions for performing the following steps in a video game:

displaying a scene having a first player-controlled character and a computer-controlled character;

in response to player commands, displaying an interaction between the first player-controlled character and the computer-controlled character, and recording said interaction;

in response to a user command, switching player control to a second character; and

replaying said interaction through the second character's point of view, wherein replaying said interaction further comprises instructions for altering a previous outcome of said recorded interaction in response to actions of the second character.

4. The media of claim 3, further comprising instructions for recording said replayed interaction having said altered outcome.

5. The media of claim 4, further comprising instructions for receiving a user command to change player control to a third character, and replaying said replayed interaction from the third character's point of view.

6. The media of claim 3, further comprising instructions for receiving additional user commands to switch control back to the first character after said step of replaying.

7. The media of claim 3, further comprising instructions for receiving additional user commands to switch player control to a third character after said step of replaying.

8. The media of claim 3, further comprising instructions for:

moving an icon representing a plurality of characters through a map scene in response to user commands; and

in response to the icon entering a predetermined area in the map scene, automatically dispersing said icon into a plurality of icons representing said characters.

9. The media of claim 8, wherein said automatic dispersal is based on stored preference data for said characters.

10. The media of claim 8, wherein said predetermined area represents a town within said game.

11. A method comprising: displaying, via a display device, a scene having a first player-controlled character and a computer-controlled character; displaying an interaction between the first player-controlled character and the computer-controlled character, and recording the interaction; in response to a user command, switching player control to a second character; and replaying the interaction through a point of view of the second character; and altering a previous outcome of the interaction in response to actions of the second character.

12. The method of claim 11, further comprising recording the replayed interaction having an altered outcome.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising receiving a second user command to change player control to a third character, and replaying the replayed interaction from a point of view of the third character.

14. The method of claim 11, further comprising receiving additional user commands to switch control back to the first character after the replaying.

15. The method of claim 11, further comprising: moving an icon representing a plurality of characters through a map scene in response to user commands; and in response to the icon entering a predetermined area in the map scene, automatically dispersing the icon into a plurality of icons representing the plurality of characters.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein automatic dispersal is based on stored preference data for the plurality of characters.

17. The method of claim 15, wherein the predetermined area represents a town within a game.

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